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Chapter II

SHELTER, SUBSISTENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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I am like an anaconda.
No one can get near my house
Because there is a lake around it.
I am a jaguar,
The bravest that is,
And no one
Can get near my house.

Song by a man to his enemies when he believes that they are about to attack

595 The center of Jivaro life is the individual house, normally
• 351 occupied by a polygynous nuclear family and surrounded by a garden in deep isolation in the forest. The house is typically built beside a small stream on a hillock where there are stands of soft or medium-hard wood. Such trees, especially palms, are easy to cut down to make garden clearings and are also preferred for house construction and firewood. The location of the house on high ground is not only better for drainage, but also furnishes a view across the surrounding garden to facilitate defensive fire in case of enemy attack (see Plate 2).

342 The dwelling is usually a large and well-made structure, oval in ground plan, with a single-gabled roof (see Figure 1). The roof is made of closely woven *kempemaki* palm thatch and is supported by nine center posts as well as by the smaller
[712] house wall posts. The windowless wall is built of stout chonta palm (*Guilielma* sp.) staves set vertically into the ground about an inch apart to permit light and air to enter,

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353 [202] nuts above the reach of small children. Occasionally a large wooden signal drum may be found leaning against a wall post. There are no other important permanent furnishings.

356 [412] The spaciousness of the house is matched by its neatness and cleanliness. The women sweep both inside and outside daily with a short broom made by lashing together branches of the *hapinimi* plant. The sweepings are put on a banana leaf and carried away in an old basket to be dumped in the forest.

354 513 Smoldering fires are maintained at the foot of all beds both in the men's and women's ends to heat the sleepers' feet especially during the nights, which are often chilly, depending upon the altitude and the weather. Those at the women's beds are also the household cooking fires (see Plate 10). All household fires are made by laying three thick palm logs so that their ends meet like the spokes of a wheel. Normally, the log ends smolder slowly, but when a pot is set upon their juncture the logs soon burst into flame. With such an arrangement, fire lighting and kindling is rarely necessary. At night, additional light is provided by burning a small torch or two of copal.

Subsistence

24 [951] [146] Each household has either a single large garden or several smaller ones. In the latter case, the house itself is usually located in the largest. Such gardens constitute almost the exclusive source of carbohydrates for the Jivaro, providing, in terms of calories, perhaps about 65 per cent of the diet. The cultivation of slowly maturing tuberous plants, especially sweet manioc (*Manihot utilissima*), which can be harvested over long periods of time, the absence of a distinct dry

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2. Side view of a Jivaro house and its surrounding garden (upper Río Yuquipa region, 1956-57).

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